

Religious Identities and the Meaning of Things in Eighteenth-Century Paris

David Garrioch

On January 6, 1777, Manon Phlippon had an adventure. She was twenty-three, the daughter of a respectable engraver and is better known to most people by her later married name of Madame Roland. It was the *fête des rois*, she was at home alone and she did something she would not normally have done. Donning her servant's clothes—a short skirt and ragged top with a large red apron and a coarse cotton cloak—she went out to discover the city. As she pushed her way through the crowds, unchaperoned and unrecognized, she experienced a new sense of freedom, “jostled by people who would have made way for me if they had seen me in my finery.”¹ Her observation, recorded in a letter to a friend, is a reminder that what Daniel Roche has called the “hierarchy of appearances” was still important in late eighteenth-century Paris. Rank was marked by dress and people reacted accordingly. Largely thanks to Roche's work, clothing is the best-known aspect of Paris material culture in this period, but it was only one of the markers of social identity. People also indicated who they were through their choice of furniture and of other objects with which they surrounded themselves. Scientific accessories like thermometers, barometers and maps pointed to a modern man of science, a devotee of the Enlightenment, while musical instruments were an accessory for a lady of quality.² Both were markers of status and of gender.

These two aspects of identity, together with urban-rural differences, have most interested historians of material culture. And this work has offered important new

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¹ C.A. Dauban, ed., *Lettres de Madame Roland aux demoiselles Cannel*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1867), 2:18 (14 Jan. 1777).

² Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing* (Cambridge, 1994). See also Daniel Roche, *A History of Everyday Things: The Birth of Consumption in France, 1600-1800*, trans. Brian Pearce (Cambridge, 2000) and Annik Pardailhé-Galabrun, *Naissance de l'intime. 3000 foyers parisiens, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1988), especially 425-27 on musical and scientific instruments.

insights into social identities and the ways they were changing.³ But the connection between religious identity and material culture has attracted much less attention. A few studies have suggested its importance, particularly in matters of dress and mainly for specific religious minorities. We know, for example, that Quakers adopted simplicity in attire and in lifestyle, rejecting worldly possessions as a distraction from spiritual things. The more austere French Jansenists and some Lutherans did the same and this posed quite a dilemma for those whose rank or occupation required them to maintain a certain style.⁴ Paris merchants and lawyers, for instance, had to maintain an air of prosperity or their clients might think they were at risk of bankruptcy and might refuse to deal with them. Most resolved this quandary by renouncing what they considered “unnecessary” comforts. That left them free to participate fully in the burgeoning consumer culture of the time and to surround themselves with luxuries that were consistent with their status, while eschewing the more extreme extravagance of the Court nobility. A few, like the German Lutheran furniture-maker Ohneberg, found another solution: despite making some of the most beautiful and luxurious furniture ever produced and accumulating a decent fortune, his apartment was very modestly decorated. But he invested quite a lot in clothing, which no doubt enabled him to maintain an appearance of prosperity when dealing with clients while living an austere Protestant life at home.⁵

This essay is concerned with the relationship between material culture and religious identity in another group in eighteenth-century Paris society, the Huguenots: French Calvinists. They were a small minority in an overwhelmingly Catholic city. There were perhaps eight to ten thousand of them in the mid-seventeenth century but far fewer in the eighteenth, since Protestantism became illegal after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and remained so until the French Revolution.⁶ They were perhaps a couple of thousand strong in the eighteenth century, probably more numerous towards the end of the period, but that is only a guess. They were there, however, and I am particularly interested in how they maintained their faith and their identity in the face of persecution, particularly in what was for the time a highly

³ Together with the work of Daniel Roche, see Colin Jones, “The Great Chain of Buying: Medical Advertisement, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Origins of the French Revolution,” *American Historical Review* 103 (1996): 13-40; Cissie Fairchilds “The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London and New York, 1993), 228-48 and “Marketing the Counter-Reformation. Religious Objects and Consumerism in Early Modern France,” in *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Christine Adams, Jack R. Censer, Lisa Jane Graham, (University Park, Penn., 1997), 31-55. There is a very large literature on other parts of Europe: see particularly the other essays in Brewer and Porter; Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, eds., *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800. Image, Object, Text* (London & New York, 1995); John Styles and Amanda Vickery, *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven, Conn., 2006).

⁴ Nicolas Lyon-Caen, “‘Marchands de miracles’. La bourgeoisie janséniste parisienne au XVIII^e siècle” (Doctoral thesis, dir. Claude Michaud, Paris I, 2008), 257.

⁵ On Protestant consumerism see Yves Krumenacker, *Des Protestants au Siècle des Lumières* (Paris, 2002), 215. For Lutherans, see Janine Driancourt-Girod, *L’insolite histoire des luthériens de Paris* (Paris, 1992), 204, 207.

⁶ The standard works on the Revocation are Elisabeth Labrousse, *La Révocation de l’Edit de Nantes*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1990), first published as “Une foi, une loi, un roi”? *Essai sur la révocation de l’Edit de Nantes* (Paris, 1985); Janine Garrisson, *L’Edit de Nantes et sa révocation* (Paris, 1985); Jean Quéniart, *La révocation de l’Edit de Nantes: Protestants et catholiques français de 1598 à 1685* (Paris, 1985); Michel-Edmond Richard, *La vie des protestants français de l’Edit de Nantes à la Révolution (1598-1789)* (Paris, 1994). For Paris, see Oreste Douen, *La Révocation de L’Edit de Nantes à Paris*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1894) and Michelle Magdelaine, “Enquête: Les protestants parisiens sous l’Ancien Régime,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français*, 145 (1999): 434-40.

policed city with an overwhelmingly Catholic culture. They faced ferocious laws banning any kind of Protestant practice. They were all deemed to have converted and were termed “New Catholics.” As such, they were obliged to take the Catholic sacraments, to send their children to catechism in the local parish and to educate them in schools dominated by the Catholic Church.

Some of them nevertheless did manage to resist and to pass on their faith to their children. When the Paris Protestant church was re-established in 1789, the congregation included not only recent arrivals from the provinces but many people whose families had migrated to Paris during the eighteenth century and a surprising number whose ancestors had lived there in the seventeenth.⁷ Some attended the chapels of the Dutch or Swedish ambassadors, who enjoyed diplomatic immunity and surreptitiously opened religious services to French Protestants. But this was risky, since the police watched these chapels. In any case, the embassies could not provide the kind of institutional and community support that a free Protestant church could offer.⁸ As in other parts of France, therefore, Paris Protestants maintained their religion essentially within their households. It was there, as Philippe Joutard has pointed out for the provinces, that their children learned the basic tenets of Calvinist theology and came to understand that they were different from the Catholic inhabitants of the city.⁹ The nature of Protestant households, the way they operated and what they contained, is therefore a key question.

We cannot assume, of course, that material objects were necessarily bearers of religious identity. After all, many everyday things become simply part of the decor, hardly noticed, the debris of daily existence. In an overwhelmingly Catholic society, possession of a crucifix or a rosary may not be evidence of anything much: it may have been presented to a child at first communion and stored in a drawer. A cross could be above all a piece of jewelry. Religious paintings could be valued for their artistry or their monetary value, with little regard for their subject matter. Drawing conclusions about the meaning of objects from their mere presence in inventories—our main source—can be risky.

There are three reasons for thinking that some objects did carry a strong religious charge, for both Catholics and Protestants. First of all, they often turn up in wills as special gifts to close relatives or friends. In 1746 Louise Girardot, a devout Jansenist to judge from the nature of her library, left a whole series of such bequests: a reliquary and a painting of Saint Louis to her confessor, a book and a holy shroud to a nun at one of the hospitals, a picture of Saint François de Sales and different religious books to a range of other friends, all female.¹⁰ She was not unusual and, in the context of the bitter religious disputes going on at the time, Jansenist books and images had both religious and political significance. But Protestants also left religious objects to their friends. The cabinet-maker Gilles Joubert bequeathed his brother his cornelian ring “on which is engraved the name of Jesus, surrounded by white jewels.”¹¹ Other Protestant testators left Bibles to designated people. These kinds of

⁷ Bibliothèque de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme français, MS 411A, baptisms June 29, 1789 to Dec. 30, 1792.

⁸ Though they did do a surprising amount, especially in the later part of the century: see Gwenaëlle Léonus-Lieppe, “La Chapelle de l’ambassade de Hollande au XVIIIe siècle: instrument du maintien du culte réformé à l’époque du Désert,” forthcoming.

⁹ Philippe Joutard, “The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes: End or Renewal of French Protestantism?” in *International Calvinism, 1541-1715*, ed. Menna Prestwich (Oxford, 1985), 339-68 (360).

¹⁰ Archives de Paris (henceforth ArchP) DC6 232, will of 6 September 1746.

¹¹ Archives nationales, Paris, Minutier central des notaires (henceforth MC) CXVII 872, Oct. 25, 1775; Archives nationales Y72, fol. 93v.

objects were, for Catholics and Protestants alike, important enough to their owners to be singled out and left to people who were close to them.

A second reason for thinking that some objects had religious significance is that images, reliquaries, statues and other pious objects were most often kept in people's bedrooms, whereas secular pictures were much more likely to be in rooms that were used for other purposes. These religious artifacts were special, linked to the individual's spiritual life and were kept away from the more communal areas of the household.¹²

A third pointer to the link between certain objects and religious identity is that there were some very marked differences between Catholic and Protestant households. Over 80 percent of Paris families possessed some sort of religious artifact in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from crosses and rosaries to books and paintings and most of these objects were clearly linked to specific forms of Catholic religious practice.¹³ Reliquaries were part of the cult of saints and would typically contain some trace of a holy person or place, perhaps a lock of hair, a fragment of cloth or bone, a pinch of soil or a vial of water from a spring or a well. Like crucifixes and holy medals, reliquaries suggest a belief in the protective or healing powers of sacred objects and may have been intended to bless and protect the home and its inhabitants. Other types of religious objects, such as rosaries and breviaries, were also linked to specifically Catholic prayers and festivals. Images of Our Lady and of the saints testify, like reliquaries, to a belief that these holy figures could help save the individual's soul after death. Indeed, it was common for people to have a particular devotion to the saint whose name they bore: the fact that around a quarter of Parisian women were named "Marie" helps explain why pictures of the Virgin were among the most common religious pictures found in deceased estates. Furthermore, some of these images were distributed by the numerous religious confraternities that proliferated in Paris—there were around five hundred at the beginning of the century and even more by 1750—and they too were a peculiarly Catholic form of collective worship, once again closely related to the cult of the saints and to concerns about death and redemption.¹⁴

Protestants on the other hand, and especially Calvinists, did not have a religious material culture of anything like the same diversity. Believing that nothing should stand between the individual and God, they not accept the cult of the Virgin Mary or of the saints. They therefore did not possess books of saints' lives or pictures

¹² Pardailhé-Galabrun, *Naissance de l'intime*, 446.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 403, 416-17, 429, 437-44, 448 and Daniel Roche, *The People of Paris*, trans. Marie Evans and Gwynne Lewis (Leamington Spa, 1987), 60. In her more limited sample, Fairchild finds 63.3% for the early eighteenth century and 50.5% for the 1770s and 1780s: "Marketing the Counter-Reformation," 36.

¹⁴ There is a huge literature on all of these topics. For a valuable overview see Jean Delumeau, *Rassurer et protéger. Le sentiment de sécurité dans l'Occident d'autrefois* (Paris, 1989). On baptismal names in Paris and their association with saints, see David Garrioch, "House Names, Shop Signs and Social Organization in Western European Cities, 1500-1900," *Urban History*, 21 (1994): 18-46 and "Suzanne, David, Judith and Isaac . . . Given Names and Protestant Religious Identity in Eighteenth-Century Paris," forthcoming. On confraternities in France see particularly the work of Marie-Hélène Froeschlé-Chopard: *Les confréries, l'Eglise et la cité*, ed. Froeschlé-Chopard, with Roger Devos (Grenoble, 1988); "Indulgences et confréries, tests de l'évolution des dévotions au dix-huitième siècle" in *Religions en transition dans la seconde moitié du dix-huitième siècle*, ed. Louis Châtellier, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 2 (2000): 75-94. On confraternities in Paris, see Jean Gaston, *Les Images des confréries parisiennes avant la Révolution* (Paris, 1910); José Lothe and Agnès Virole, eds., *Images des confréries parisiennes* (Paris, 1992); and David Garrioch, "La sécularisation précoce de Paris au XVIIIe siècle," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 12 (2005): 35-75.

of saints, other than perhaps the apostles, and they certainly did not keep relics.¹⁵ They did not own crucifixes, rosaries, holy water containers or statues. As in Calvinist churches, with their bare walls and austere furnishings, it is the absence of things that appears most significant, the deliberate avoidance of distractions from the word of the Scripture.

But there were some religious objects that were specifically Calvinist or that they were more likely to own. When the police raided the apartment of a silk-worker on the Ile de la Cité in 1693 they identified a book of prayers and a volume of “instructions for children,” a collection of the Psalms of David and another Protestant work called *Du combat chrétien*. Then they noticed that the man of the house was sitting on a chair with a rather thick base. Inside it they found a Protestant catechism, various pamphlets, collections of sermons, a New Testament and more psalms.¹⁶ This was precisely the kind of material the authorities were looking for, evidence of the family’s continuing refusal to embrace Catholic practice. Inventories of deceased estates occasionally record the same kinds of reading material. The banker Paul Foissin, who died in 1773, left a valuable library that included sermons, psalms and scripture. He also demonstrated an interest in dissident religious movements, possessing a history of the Anabaptists and other books on Jansenism.¹⁷

Both Catholics and Protestants owned religious pictures, but here too they made different choices—though unfortunately the notaries who drew up the inventories were only interested in the more valuable items and described the rest simply as “devotional pictures.” Yet where we do have more information, some of these items reflect the religious affiliations of their owners. Marguerite Girardot de Préfonds, whose well-appointed apartment overlooked the Seine and the Ile Saint-Louis, owned a large number of paintings, mainly portraits, landscapes and classical and mythological subjects, but there was also a painting depicting the family of Jean Calas, the Toulouse Protestant whose unjust execution launched Voltaire’s campaign for religious toleration for French Protestants.¹⁸

It seems clear, then, that certain kinds and combinations of objects had real religious significance and were markers of one particular faith. But what of the many other objects that were owned by both Protestants and Catholics? Should we assume that similar objects had the same significance for people with markedly different world views? It is likely, for example, that the Chinese artifacts that became collector’s items in eighteenth-century Europe did not mean the same to their Western owners as for their original Chinese owners. A few historical studies have raised this question in other contexts, in relation to class difference for example. A recent analysis of the décor of bourgeois households in nineteenth-century Paris comments on the way that antique rustic furniture and porcelain became fashionable and assumed new meaning when placed on display in well-to-do apartments. Once utilitarian items, perhaps also symbols of affluence for their original peasant owners, in their new context they became links to what was now perceived to be an authentic national past. Along with other types of antiques, they identified their owners as people of taste and at the same time conferred a kind of legitimacy on lineages whose fortune was often quite recent. Meanwhile the popular classes, in Paris and in the

¹⁵ On book ownership, see Philip Benedict, “Bibliothèques protestantes et catholiques à Metz au XVIIIe siècle,” *Annales ESC*, 40 (1985): 343-70.

¹⁶ Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, Ms fr 21621, fol. 268.

¹⁷ MC LXXIII 944, Apr. 28, 1773. See also MC XXIV 840, June 14, 1768; MC LXXIII 897, Dec. 29, 1767, inventory dated July 3, 1767.

¹⁸ MC LXXIII 897, Dec. 29, 1767, inventory dated July 3, 1767.

countryside, preferred to spend their spare cash on *new* things: for them, old objects signified poverty.¹⁹

If particular objects could thus mean different things in disparate class and cultural contexts, did their significance also differ according to the religious faith of their owners? Let us consider the three religious pictures that hung in the modest apartment of a Protestant candlemaker in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in 1707. One was a Virgin and child and the two others depicted Mary Magdalene.²⁰ These subjects would not have been out of place in any Paris household. In a Catholic context, however, both the Virgin and Mary Magdalene were powerful intercessors who could assist the souls of the faithful to enter Paradise. In a Protestant family, by contrast, the pictures would certainly not have been interpreted in this way. We do not know what they looked like, but representations of the infant Jesus in his mother's arms or of the Magdalene were acceptable to Protestants as long as they did not suggest a privileged saintly status for either of the women. For the candlemaker and his family, they presumably functioned as reminders of Christian faith and conventionally Mary Magdalene symbolized penitence. But in this context their significance also arises from the fact that they were isolated pictures, probably the only images in the apartment and certainly the only ones of any value. All were on canvas with frames of gilded wood and they hung in the bedroom on the first floor, not in the everyday living and working areas located on the ground floor. They were therefore in dedicated family spaces. They were isolated, too, in that they were as far as we know the only religious objects in the household. They were not crowded by crucifixes or statues. There was no competition, if I can put it that way, so their prominence was not diluted.

Although the number of detailed inventories of Protestant estates is small, it seems that they favored Old Testament themes, which were fairly unusual in Catholic households.²¹ A Calvinist goldsmith living on the Ile de la Cité had a picture of Lot and his daughters in the living room. A wood merchant owned a painting showing Abraham and Isaac.²² Once again, neither picture would have been unacceptable in a Catholic context, but the subjects do not seem coincidental. While we cannot know exactly what the paintings meant to their owners, both the Lot and the Abraham stories are about God testing the faith and obedience of his people and eventually delivering those who remained true. This was particularly meaningful for Protestants experiencing persecution in what they saw as a sinful Catholic environment (and Paris was sometimes likened to Sodom and Gomorrah). Both Biblical stories, furthermore, depict the family as the unit of faith, surrounded by people who did not know the true religion and in both of them filial obedience is linked to obedience to God as the source of salvation: remaining true to the faith of one's fathers.

Religious artifacts are the obvious place to look for confessional allegiances but it is likely that divergent beliefs were sometimes expressed in other kinds of objects that had no obvious religious significance. Perhaps the most common paintings in Paris apartments—at least the ones the notaries took the trouble to identify—were family portraits. This was true of both Catholic and Protestant households. Most middle- and upper-class families displayed portraits of parents,

¹⁹ Manuel Charpy, "L'ordre des choses. Sur quelques traits de la culture matérielle bourgeoise parisienne," *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle*, 34 (2007): 105-28 (110-13).

²⁰ MC XIX 585, inventory of Mar. 21, 1707.

²¹ Pardailhé-Galabrun comments on the relative paucity of Biblical subjects: *Naissance de l'intime*, 435-36. See also Lyon-Caen, "Marchands de miracles," 273.

²² MC X 305, Dec. 16, 1712; MC V 708, Apr. 20, 1779.

grandparents and sometimes of other ancestors or relatives. They depicted individuals, not family groups, often in matching frames and hung side by side. Conventionally unsmiling, they do not convey an impression of loving couples or of family togetherness. But they created a sense of family in a different way. In a society in which lineage remained vitally important, they served to remind individuals of who they were and where they came from. Prominently displayed in living rooms and bedrooms, they were clearly a source of pride and served something of the same purpose as genealogies, preserving what André Burguière has termed “la mémoire familiale.”²³ And like genealogies, they were a cultural practice with a scent of nobility, part of a claim to tradition that in eighteenth-century thinking bestowed legitimacy. They were perhaps even associated—it is not clear how consciously—with the family representations that patrician families in Ancient Rome were believed to have displayed. These associations elevated the present generation, showing them to be descended from people of rank and dignity, worthy of being immortalized on canvas. But above all, as in England, family portraits were a way of displaying filial piety and hence the moral virtue of their owners. That is why, as Mathieu Marraud points out in his forthcoming book, even robe nobles continued to display portraits of their non-noble and merchant ancestors.²⁴

Many portraits no doubt made direct reference to the qualities that individual ancestors were believed to have possessed, through the clothes and the expressions they wore and the dignity of their posture. In this way they offered an example to their descendants. The more elaborate ones included attributes referring to the person’s interests and achievements. Even someone like the miniaturist painter Jean-Baptiste Massé, a member of a predominantly Protestant family of goldsmiths and jewelers who took immense pride in his appointment as *peintre du roi*, possessed a portrait of himself “holding in one hand one of my plans for the gallery at Versailles, in the other a pencil-holder.” Having no children of his own, he bequeathed it to his nephew, stipulating that it could not be sold but must be passed on to the following generation.²⁵ His will explains at some length the importance of the work he had done and it is clear that he was attempting both to ensure that he would not be forgotten and that he would be remembered in a particular way.

This is a rare case, because Massé both describes the portrait and explains its significance—though we do not, of course, know if his relatives remembered him in this way! But this linking of ancestry with religion is something Philippe Joutard observed in his study of the Cévennes, where Huguenot resistance became a family tradition, to the extent that conversion or even marriage to a Catholic was seen as a breach of faith and a betrayal of the “founding father” of the lineage.²⁶ Religion was very much a part of Protestant family identity, reinforced by persecution and by a sense of isolation in a hostile environment. Family portraits therefore almost certainly served as reminders of the faith of people’s ancestors and as ways of both expressing and reinforcing that of the current generation.

²³ André Burguière, “La mémoire familiale du bourgeois gentilhomme: généalogies domestiques en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles,” *Annales ESC*, 46 (1991): 771-88.

²⁴ Louise Lippincott, “Expanding on Portraiture. The Market, the Public, and the Hierarchy of Genres in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” in *The Consumption of Culture*, ed. Bermingham and Brewer, 75-88 (82). See Mathieu Marraud, *De la Ville à l’Etat: la bourgeoisie parisienne, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2009).

²⁵ MC CXVII 502, July 1, 1778.

²⁶ Joutard, “The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes,” 367-68.

While family portraits were common in the homes of Catholics and Protestants alike, they almost certainly meant different things to the two groups. They may also have carried a religious charge for Catholics, particularly when the ancestor in question was particularly pious. Nevertheless, as in the case of other religious artifacts, Catholics had more options. If they wanted to demonstrate their religious faith through the display of portraits, they had pictures of saints, bishops or popes. Jansenists often displayed paintings or engravings showing Bishop Soanen of Senez, Bishop Colbert of Montpellier, Bishop Caylus or other leaders of the Jansenist cause.²⁷ These once again demonstrate clearly the religious and political charge that portraits could carry. Protestants do not seem to have displayed portraits of Calvin—perhaps they were afraid to be so blatant—but it is likely that children growing up in Huguenot households in Paris learned to identify with their ancestral religion as much through their sense of family as through formal religious instruction.

There is one further way in which objects may have had religious significance for Paris Protestants. In 1730 the cabinet-maker Pierre Migeon started a new account book in which he recorded the payments he made to his numerous workers and subcontractors. Migeon is well known as one of the leading furniture-makers in eighteenth-century Paris and as a Calvinist. On the first page of his new account book he wrote:

As I have nothing in the world more dear to me than my son, and as I have nothing closer to my heart than his advancement, I pray God from the bottom of my heart to grant me through his divine grace the ability to conduct my trade with probity . . . Declaring before God that I have no other goal but to leave him the small amount that I have been able to accumulate, with much hard work, though it will never be very substantial, and to convey to him the grace that God has granted me, being persuaded that any goods acquired honestly will often be passed on even to the great grandsons, and that those which are acquired through deception will often scarcely reach the first generation. That is why, for the order of my affairs, should God take me from this earth, I begin this register fully aware of his divine goodness; and pray him with all my soul to grant me his holy grace so that I may know eternal happiness, Amen.²⁸

This passage offers a remarkable insight into the way this Calvinist artisan linked his work with both his family and his religious belief. It is the most detailed example I have found, but not the only one. The Horry brothers, carriage-makers who were related to Migeon by marriage, attributed their considerable fortune “to the sweat and toil that each of them contributed for the common good and to the blessing that God bestowed on it.” Another cabinet-maker, Gilles Joubert, also spoke in his will of the fortune “acquired by the work of my hands that the Good Lord has seen fit to bless.”²⁹ These are sentiments that Catholic artisans may have shared but that they do not seem to have felt impelled to express. In each case the point is the same: hard work, probity and God’s grace enabled these Protestant artisans to provide for their families and to pass on a modest fortune to their descendants. Material possessions thus acquired were blessed. Not only that: they provided evidence of God’s grace.

²⁷ Marraud, forthcoming; Lyon-Caen, “Marchands de miracles,” 62.

²⁸ ArchP D5 B6 5491.

²⁹ Sophie Mouquin, *Pierre IV Migeon, 1696-1758. Au cœur d'une dynastie d'ébénistes parisiens* (Paris, 2001), 25. MC CXVII 872, Oct. 25, 1775.

Although Calvinists believed in predestination and knew they belonged to the Elect, worldly prosperity was proof that they were God's people, whom he blessed and protected. This must have been particularly reassuring to the persecuted French Protestants, who prospered despite the disfavor of their rulers.

In a variety of ways, then, material objects of different kinds do appear to have been linked to religious belief and to have carried distinctly Protestant or Catholic meanings. Sometimes the possession or rejection of particular items reflected theological differences, as in the case of artifacts associated with the cult of saints or other specifically Catholic practices. But even when Paris Calvinists surrounded themselves with many of the same consumer items as Catholics of similar wealth and social standing, the way they perceived these material possessions appears to have been different in certain key respects. The Protestant attribution of religious significance to these objects is a reminder that we should be cautious in linking eighteenth-century consumerism with secular modernity.

Differences in the meaning of things were related to religious identity. While French Protestants had to be careful about expressing their Calvinism publicly, within their households they did so in part through their choice of the objects with which they surrounded themselves. In so doing, they also helped to shape the religious identity of their children. The physical environment was one of the ways in which both Catholic and Protestant children learned who they were. When young Protestants entered Catholic households, therefore, they saw objects they did not see at home. Catholics displayed religious objects of many kinds, often images and relics of the saints whose names they bore. In some cases they even named their houses and shops after their patron saint. As we have seen, Protestant practice was quite different and when Protestant families discussed religious matters at home, as we know they did, they passed on a rejection of "Papist" meanings of things and instead instilled Protestant ones. Understandings of family, embedded in portraits and other mementoes, were inseparable from religious faith. In this way, Protestant material culture both shaped and helped to maintain identity, and this was one of the means by which a significant number of Paris Calvinists successfully maintained their long, silent resistance to religious persecution.